



**A Report for
The United States House of
Representatives**

**Information Technology
Assessment: To-Be Vision
Report**

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Gartner

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A Ten Year Technology Vision for the House of Representatives

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1. Introduction

In August 2004, the Committee on House Administration (CHA) and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) initiated a project to develop a vision and plan for the future use of technology in the House of Representatives. To support this project, CHA initiated a partnership between Gartner and the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF). Gartner is an internationally-respected technology consulting firm with extensive experience assessing and developing technology strategies for federal, state and local governments and *Fortune 500* corporations. CMF is a non-profit organization that provides management services to Congress and has developed extensive knowledge of House operations.

The first phase of this project was to conduct extensive research with key stakeholders. Gartner and CMF have been working closely with the majority and minority staff from CHA and the CAO and his staff. The project began with detailed interviews of 128 Members, managers, and staff throughout the House and the legislative branch to discuss the challenges they and the House face, how technology is impacting work in the House, and how the House can help them do their jobs better. The views of both Republicans and Democrats were included.

Using the information collected in the interviews, the project team identified possible visions to guide House technology adoption over the next ten years and developed a process to vet these visions with different groups of House stakeholders. Through these discussions, a ten-year vision for technology in the House of Representatives was created. This report provides a summary of this vision.

This report concludes the second phase of the House Strategy and Technology Assessment project. The final phase of the project will provide strategies and a roadmap for how the House can successfully implement this vision. Research for the final phase will include roundtable discussions with key stakeholders to determine how technology in the House is governed, analysis of strategies and technologies, and cost estimates.

2. Methodology

Between January and July of 2005, Gartner and CMF facilitated six roundtable discussions with high-level House stakeholders. The purpose of the discussions was to identify and vet visions and principles that should drive technology adoption in the House over the next ten years. The discussions involved Members of committees responsible for management and oversight of the House, leadership Staff Directors, House officers and legislative branch officials, committee Staff Directors, Member office Chiefs of Staff, and high-level House and legislative branch technology administrators. In a series of meetings, these groups addressed a range of issues related to House culture, policy, process, and technology adoption.

Participating in the roundtable discussions were representatives from the:



- Speaker of the House
- House Majority Leader
- House Minority Leader
- Majority and minority Whips
- House Republican Conference
- House Democratic Caucus
- Majority and minority Committee on Appropriations
- Majority and minority Committee on House Rules
- Majority and minority Committee on House Administration
- Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
- Office of the Clerk of the House
- Office of the Sergeant at Arms
- Office of the Parliamentarian of the House
- Office of Legislative Counsel
- Office of Law Revision Counsel
- Office of the House Inspector General
- Office of Emergency Planning, Preparedness, and Operations
- Government Printing Office
- Congressional Research Service
- Congressional Budget Office
- Government Accountability Office

Also included were interested Chiefs of Staff and Staff Directors recruited based upon their active participation in the first phase of the project.

The first four of the roundtables were conducted as a unit. Separate discussions were held with three defined groups: Member office Chiefs of Staff and Staff Directors; House officers and legislative branch officials; and House and legislative branch technology administrators. Because each of these groups had somewhat differing perspectives on House needs and operations, we convened a fourth roundtable with representatives from each group to reconcile the areas where their visions diverged. Through this process, representatives from each group discussed their views and developed a vision on which the participants agreed.

The result of these four discussions was then taken to the Staff Directors of House leadership offices for review, discussion, and feedback. Through this process, the vision was more finely honed and the challenges and opportunities were further defined. This information was then presented to the Member group, which provided feedback and made decisions about key components of the vision.

3. Context

In addition to identifying a ten-year vision, the participants identified two principle factors that are exerting pressure on the House for technological change: evolving forces on the House and institutional challenges faced by the House.



Evolving Forces on the House

The following factors were identified by the House stakeholders as exerting pressure on the House to integrate technology more thoroughly and more rapidly.

1. **The looming budget crunch.** There was agreement that there will be continued belt-tightening throughout the government in the coming years, and that the legislative branch would need to identify opportunities for cost savings.
2. **Increasing security demands.** In the words of one House officer, “it’s not a matter of whether, but when.” There was a clear sense in the discussions that the House needs to be prepared for more security crises in the future and that technology can play a critical role in creating a more secure work environment and ensuring the continuity of House operations.
3. **Increasing comfort of new Members with technology.** The officers have already seen a shift in new Member attitudes toward technology. Businesses and state legislatures provide capabilities and services that in many cases exceed what is offered in the House. Consequently, new Members are increasingly demanding that the House enhance its capabilities and services.
4. **Increasing communication and information demands by constituents and the press.** Technology has raised public expectation for communicating with, and receiving information from, the House. Member offices are struggling with rising volumes of constituent communications; committees are struggling with demands for greater access to their information and activities; and institutional offices like the Clerk, GPO and the Library of Congress are struggling to keep pace with public expectations. These public demands will continue to evolve and exert further pressure on the House for change.
5. **Continuing integration of technology into society.** The participants in our roundtable discussions accepted the premise that House operations were going to be changed by technology. Over time, our society and our institutions will become increasingly connected; communications capabilities will continue to increase; and information access will continue to proliferate. As a knowledge-based institution, the House will need to be responsive to these trends.
6. **Increasing demands of the legislative cycle.** The leadership Staff Directors indicated that technology has enabled documents and legislation to be produced and considered more quickly than ever before. As a result, speed has become a strategy in the legislative process. In this environment, technology can provide opportunities to improve Member and staff access to information and enhance the effectiveness of the institution.

The participants saw these forces as compelling reasons for the House to think strategically about technology now and to begin planning for change. They agreed that these forces are going to impact the House one way or another, whether or not the House is prepared for them. Consequently, the stakeholders concluded that planning for the inevitable change would strengthen the House and make it more effective, while reacting to these forces in a fragmented, piecemeal fashion would weaken the House and prove far more costly.

Institutional Challenges

The House faces some significant challenges in its efforts to most effectively integrate technology into its operations over the next ten years. The challenges are not the result of mismanagement or anything the House has been doing wrong. Rather, they largely stem from policies, practices, and traditions that have been in place for decades increasingly coming into conflict with modern capabilities and demands. The House is experiencing pressure felt by the corporate community in the mid 1990's, and which resulted in e-commerce. The executive branch began to feel the same pressure in the late 1990's, and it is resulting in e-government. The House and other legislatures are now beginning to grapple with the same pressure. Traditional operations are being tested by modern technologies, and institutions are being forced to adapt. The House will be no exception.

The factors identified by the participants in our roundtable discussions as being the greatest challenges to more thoroughly integrating technology into House operations were:

- 1. Lack of standards.** At present, Member and staff electronic access to important legislative information is limited by House culture and policy, and by the nonstandard practices of committees. For the most part, each committee defines its own practices, timeframes, document formats and systems for creating and providing access to the official legislative documents within its jurisdiction (bills, amendments, committee reports, etc.). Because each committee's policies and processes are different, it is extremely difficult and costly to streamline document management and facilitate better, easier access to these documents by Members and staff. If systems and efforts could be more standardized and coordinated, there would be great potential to increase efficiency, enhance effectiveness and access, and reduce costs. One example where this potential is already beginning to be realized is with the electronic standards being incorporated into documents produced by the Office of Legislative Counsel. These standards have made it much easier, more efficient, and less expensive for the Office of the Clerk, the GPO, and the Library of Congress to manage bills, committee prints, and other statutory documents produced by the Office of Legislative Counsel.
- 2. Lack of House-wide technology coordination or authority.** There is no House office or entity with the mandate or authority to plan and coordinate House technology resources, projects, and expenditures and to ensure they are targeted to institutional goals and needs. There are organizations with authority over some aspects of technology decision-making – including the Office of the CAO, the Office of the Clerk of the House, and CHA – but none have the mandate or authority to coordinate beyond their own jurisdictions.
- 3. Disparate systems.** The House is unable to take advantage of opportunities for increased efficiency, effectiveness and cost savings because systems and processes are being developed in disparate “silos.” This is a common challenge faced by institutions attempting to make a transition to more thorough technology adoption and use. The political, public, and decentralized nature of the House, however, increases both the difficulty of breaking down and integrating silos and the likelihood of turf battles.

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- 4. Lack of resources.** Technology has placed new demands on Members by their constituents, parties, and staffs. Members must react more quickly and more frequently to more people than ever before, and their offices depend on technology to operate smoothly. However, Member office resources are not keeping pace with the demands on Member offices to: operate what are, essentially, small businesses; be responsive to constituents; and conduct their legislative and political duties.

For the House to most effectively implement the ten year vision, these challenges will need to be directly addressed and overcome. However, because they touch on some of the long-standing House traditions and practices, resolving them will likely require involvement of House leadership, senior staff, and Members, in addition to technical staff.

4. Ten Year Vision for Technology in the House

The House of Representatives is an institution that thrives on information and communication. As a result, technology is critical for supporting the key business processes of the institution:

- The legislative process;
- Member office operations;
- Institutional operational support;
- Member activities; and
- Party organization.

For each of these business processes, stakeholders identified a ten year vision for technology. These visions are presented below. Each section provides brief background and context for the vision, describes the vision identified by the participants, discusses the tradeoffs the House would have to make to attain the vision, and raises additional views gleaned from discussion of the visions by senior staff and Members.

Legislative Process

Background

Integration of technology into the legislative process is currently compartmentalized. Each organization involved – including the Office of Legislative Counsel, the Office of the Clerk of the House, committees, GPO, and the Office of Law Revision Counsel – is responsible for identifying, acquiring, and supporting technology to conduct its work. Although they contribute to a single final product – public law – there is little coordination or standardization among them of processes, formats, or technologies. In a paper-based environment this has little impact, since there are few benefits to greater coordination and standardization. In an electronic, networked environment, however, significant benefits are now available. To realize the benefits, however, the House must make significant changes. Currently, the standards and coordination that does exist – such as that being employed by the Office of Legislative Counsel, the Office of the Clerk, GPO, and the Library of Congress – is implemented on a voluntary basis. Organizations that do not voluntarily participate must be accommodated or worked around.

This significantly limits the potential for greater efficiency, effectiveness, and cost-savings. It also severely limits the ability of the House to make the legislative process more effective by: integrating technologies to simplify and expedite the legislative process; improving information access by Members and staff; and improving the production and publication of legislation, official documents, and public law.

The Vision

1. **During consideration in committee and on the House floor, Members should be able to see the specific changes amendments would make to bills and that bills would make to public law.** Currently, the affect of amendments on bills or of bills on public law can only be seen after they have passed and are included in committee or House report language. Additionally, the Ramseyer Rule (which requires that committee reports document the changes proposed committee language would have on existing public law) is often waived because of the time and difficulty of complying with the rule. As a result, the specific changes legislation will have on public law are unclear until well after the law has passed. This leads to contradictions, conflicts and avoidable redundancies in public law. To help limit these problems, the Office of Legislative Counsel is in the process of developing a system for their own use to automate the preparation of Ramseyers, but progress has been limited by budgetary constraints and the lack of timely compilations of public law.
2. **Members and staff should have timely access to updated U.S. Code after legislation is passed into law.** Currently, there is a one to two year delay after a given Congress before the U.S. Code – the official codification of U.S. public law – is updated to reflect changes made during that Congress. As a result, new legislation – usually based on existing law – is drafted and considered without access to an updated official version of current public law. This leads to contradictory and redundant legislation and confusing law.
3. **Members and staff should be able to access all bills in searchable electronic formats before they are considered on the House floor.** Although many bills are available in searchable electronic formats prior to consideration, many are not, including some key bills, such as appropriations bills. As a result, Members and staff find it difficult to adequately review these bills prior to consideration.
4. **Members should have electronic access to relevant legislative information during committee and floor sessions.** Currently, Members do not have electronic access in chambers to any legislative information during committee markups or floor consideration of legislation. As a result, Members must either have the relevant paper documents on hand or must consider, debate, and vote on bills and amendments without the benefit of legislative history, information about bills in other committees, the text of public law, or a variety of other resources that could influence their decisions.
5. **The House should automate the management and production of official legislative documents.** Currently, technology is used at every stage of the legislative process, but, for the most part, the systems are not integrated or coordinated among legislative organizations. The Office of Legislative Counsel, the Clerk of the House, the Government Printing Office, and the Library of Congress have developed electronic

standards that have enabled them to automate the management and production of most bills and amendments, but since committees are not using these standards, documents produced by committees cannot be automatically managed and produced.

Consequently, there are time-consuming and sometimes redundant administrative tasks that must be performed throughout the legislative process that could be eliminated if the House were to adopt uniform standards, systems or processes. For example, the drafters of legislative documents (e.g. the attorneys in the Office of Legislative Counsel and committee clerks and stenographers from the Office of the Clerk of the House) must learn different document formats and processes for each committee. Having to learn and apply more than a dozen different formats for legislative documents takes far more time and requires far more staff and training than it would if all committees used standard formats, systems, or processes.

- 6. Electronic documents should be part of the official legislative record.** Currently, only paper documents serve as the official record for the House, although electronic documents are produced throughout the process. This leads to discrepancies between the paper and electronic versions, as well as administrative burdens that could be reduced if electronic documents became part of the official record. For example, the producers of legislative documents from the Office of the Clerk and the Government Printing Office must manually compare every official paper version of bills and amendments against electronic versions to ensure they match, and, when electronic versions are not available to them, they must retype entire documents prior to printing, which adds significant administrative time and effort to the production of documents. Members expressed reservations about making electronic documents the official record, but senior staff viewed this as necessary. As a result of this discrepancy, this component of the vision will require further discussion and clarification before the House develops an implementation plan for this capability.

The Tradeoffs

Attaining this vision will not be easy, but it would lead to significant benefits to the House, including: enhancing Member and staff access to critical information on which to base legislative decisions; improving the flow and production of documents throughout the legislative process; facilitating easier and more user-friendly access, use, and collaboration on legislative documents; reducing the administrative workload and staff resources necessary to produce legislative documents; and reducing administrative and technical costs.

Technologies already exist to attain the vision, but implementing them will require making difficult tradeoffs. Making changes in this area can have unintended consequences on the legislative process and Member deliberation. As a result, the real challenge for the House will be to carefully consider the benefits, weigh the tradeoffs, and identify the implications the changes will have on the legislative process before developing implementation plans and making large investments. Attaining this vision would also require making changes to existing rules, policies, and practices to enable truly effective technologies and systems to be implemented. These would potentially include: changing how legislation is drafted; facilitating agreement among all House committees on standard processes and document formats; modifying House rules to allow for new processes and procedures; modifying the format, and

possibly the content, of the U.S. Code; and preparing and training Members and staff to use and feel comfortable with the new systems and processes.

Officer and Senior Staff Discussion

Despite the challenges, the officers and senior staff saw compelling reasons for working toward these capabilities over the next ten years. They viewed the current administrative and management processes as untenable over the next decade because of their inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and high cost. They felt that attaining the vision would provide great benefits to Members, staff, the institution, and the public. They stressed, however, that any effort to move the House toward this vision would require significant coordination and collaboration of the House officers and high level staff and oversight or approval of Members, themselves, since the issues involved in this vision would potentially have significant impact on the legislative process and Member deliberation.

Member Discussion

The Members also considered most of the components of this vision to be logical and necessary changes that should be made over the next decade. They felt the House should be working toward means to increase efficiency and effectiveness and provide Members and staff with information to better enable them to produce quality legislation and make informed decisions. They stressed, however, that technology should not make the legislative process so efficient as to eliminate the necessary debate and deliberation that must occur in a legislative body. Nor should it be used to reduce the face-to-face interaction among Members that is so critical to the legislative process. They also noted that any efforts that significantly impact the House legislative process must also involve the Senate. Finally, they stressed that, although these capabilities could also be used to broaden public access, there is a need to carefully reflect and define when and how to provide public access to legislative documents.

The one capability for which the Members expressed reservations was making electronic documents the official record. They articulated concerns about public access to electronic documents, Member comfort with electronic documents, and the challenges associated with archiving and preserving electronic documents. The officers and senior staff did not share these concerns. They saw these issues as challenges that could and should be overcome to provide the necessary capabilities and greatest possible benefit to Members and staff. They also felt that making electronic documents part of the official legislative record would be a prerequisite for attaining the rest of the vision.

Member Office Operations

Background

Each Member office independently acquires hardware, software, and vendors to support its operations, with some notable exceptions (e.g. anti-virus, central networks, e-mail, etc.). This provides offices with the flexibility to choose what works best for them, but it also requires that

each office devote significant effort and resources to managing these technical matters. In addition, the financial and staff resources expended in aggregate by individual offices, the institution, and vendors to support this decentralized model are significant and could be greatly reduced if efforts were more coordinated. Gartner estimates that the House currently pays 33.5% more for Member office hardware and software than a comparably-sized organization with centralized technical administration.

The Vision

- 1. The House, as an institution, should bear the bulk of Member office technology expenses, minimizing the cost to individual offices in exchange for offices accepting new limitations.** Currently, each Member office must use its Member Representational Allowance (MRA) to acquire and support equipment, hardware, and software. As a result, because individual Member offices are small, they cannot realize economies of scale that would come from bulk institutional purchases.
- 2. Systems administration services should be provided to Member offices by the House to free Member office staff of those duties.** Member offices currently hire or contract their own systems administration services. In the House's decentralized technology model, these staff are intended to be the primary technical support resources for Member offices. However, many Member offices assign this position to staff without technical knowledge or training, which leaves their offices vulnerable to mismanagement, mistakes, inefficiencies, and security problems. Additionally, there is often confusion and dispute among Member offices, technology vendors, and the House about who is responsible for solving problems that arise.
- 3. The House should provide greater information access, service, and technical support to district offices.** The House currently provides basic technical service and support to district offices, including connecting main district offices to the House network and to Members' Washington offices; providing technical training options on-demand; and providing Internet and e-mail access to staff in the primary district office. The House also provides fee-based services to secondary district offices. However, the House does not emphasize technical services and support for district offices to the same degree as to Washington offices, in part due to the expense and challenges associated with providing for and supporting remote offices throughout the country.
- 4. The House should provide greater assistance to Member offices in meeting constituent demands.** Currently, the House does not provide or support technological applications and services that support or facilitate interactions between Member offices and constituents, such as correspondence management systems, advanced Web services, or casework management systems. For the most part, technical decisions related to these interactions have been left to individual Member offices to make. This places offices in the position of identifying and acquiring necessary hardware, software, equipment, and expertise to support their efforts. However, few offices can afford robust systems to support many-to-one and one-to-many communications and information sharing that could potentially be provided by the House as shared services.

The Tradeoffs

Attaining this vision would require the House to move to a more centralized technology service and support model. This would relieve Member offices of most or all of the responsibility to research and acquire equipment and software and maintain and support the systems. They would also likely realize cost savings through bulk purchase rates which would also enable the House, as an institution, to leverage greater control over vendor practices than can individual offices. Additionally, centralizing technical support would increase the level of training and expertise of the staff providing the IT support services.

A more centralized model would also likely reduce the cost to the House of supporting the many systems and configurations currently in use, as well as reduce the House's reliance on systems integrators and support vendors. The greater diversity of systems and configurations in use in an organization, the more difficult and expensive it is to support them, since technical staff knowledgeable in the range of systems must be available. This requires either a technical staff with significant and diverse training or a greater number of technical staff than would be necessary if fewer systems and configurations were in use. Currently, this technical expertise is provided to Member offices mostly by vendors, who factor this diversity and training into their fees. Standardizing on a smaller range of systems would reduce costs, as well as increase satisfaction with technical support, since technical staff would be trained to support the specific systems in use and could more quickly and easily identify and solve problems and replace faulty hardware and software.

However, adopting a more centralized technology service model would reduce offices' autonomy and flexibility to purchase the hardware, software, and service they want. To maximize the benefits, the House would need to standardize systems and configurations or reduce the options from which to choose. It would also possibly require offices to give up physical control – but not security or access control – over some of their data in order to realize the greatest security, cost, and service benefits from centralized services.

A more centralized technology service model would also require modifications to the current technology budgeting structure. Currently, each Member office purchases technology using its own MRA. If technology service and support were to be more centralized, it would be necessary to modify budgets accordingly. For example, it would be necessary to increase the budget of the office or organization providing the centralized services in order to fund the new responsibilities, purchases and services. This could possibly occur by shifting funds from the MRAs to the central authority or through an increase in appropriations for the central authority without reducing the MRAs.

Officer and Senior Staff Discussion

The officers and senior staff saw significant benefits to the House moving Member offices toward a more centralized technical environment. Member office Chiefs of Staff acknowledged frustration with having to spend significant time and money on technology when there are things that all offices use and which the House could easily and more cost-effectively provide. However, they stressed that in order for them to be comfortable with a more centralized model

they would have to have some choice, such as a low-end, medium, and high-end office configuration. They also indicated that technical support would have to be responsive, highly competent, knowledgeable about the business of Member offices, and accountable for providing high-quality and timely solutions to problems. Finally, they were emphatic that they would need strong assurances that their data would be secure and that they would control access to it for them to willingly give up physical control of it.

The officers viewed this from a slightly different perspective. They strongly felt that a centralized environment will be necessary in the future, especially given current security concerns. To preserve continuity of House operations in the event of an emergency that closes the House office buildings, they saw the need for standardized systems in Member offices and more centralized data storage. Otherwise, reliable, effective, efficient, and comprehensive continuity of House operations can really only be achieved with great effort, coordination, and expense. Additionally, the officers viewed the task of securing House data as an increasing challenge that will require better trained and more qualified technical staff than Member offices' budgets can provide.

Member Discussion

The Members viewed this vision as necessary for future efficiency, effectiveness, and cost savings. They acknowledged that the House could realize significant cost savings by standardizing Member office hardware and software. They also were aware that, for the most part, there is little variety in the hardware and software used in one Member office versus another. There is variation in brands and configurations from office to office, but most require the same basic capabilities. As a result, the Members determined that the benefits of a more centralized technical environment for Member offices outweigh the current benefits of choice and flexibility.

Institutional Operational Support

Background

In the House, technology support, planning, and decisions are made by each organization independently. Each House office provides technologies and services to fulfill its role. Currently, there is no institution-wide process for coordinating their decisions or establishing priorities and making strategic technology decisions for the House, as a whole. As a result, there is generally little coordination of technology projects, objectives, and budgets at the institutional level, so efforts are sometimes in competition or conflict with one another, and sometimes efforts are duplicated. This results in greater costs and fewer benefits to the House than would be realized if technology planning were coordinated at the institutional level.

The Vision

- 1. Effectiveness, rather than efficiency, should be the primary objective of technology in the House.** The House does not currently have an overarching objective

for technology adoption. Some efforts are geared toward efficiency, others toward effectiveness, others still toward being as responsive as possible to the demands of individual Members and staff. As a result of this lack of a primary objective, technology goals and strategies are often in conflict from organization to organization, and even, occasionally, within organizations.

2. **The House should minimize the cost of technology to the institution.** Committees and institutional offices, like Member offices, each use their own budgets to purchase hardware and software and hire or contract technical support. Because this model requires each office to be an independent actor, the House, as an institution, faces challenges in taking advantage of significant cost savings that could be realized through bulk purchases, shared system support, and shared services.
3. **The House should assign formal jurisdiction for technology planning to a specific House organization or group.** There are some organizations – including the Office of the CAO, the Office of the Clerk, and CHA – with mandates that cover specific aspects of technology planning for the House, as an institution, but each has a limited jurisdiction. There is not currently a single group or organization with formal jurisdiction over technology assessment and planning for the institution, as a whole. Coordinated technology planning at the institutional level tends to occur only when crises arise, such as the Year 2000 conversion, 9/11, and the evacuations due to anthrax and ricin.
4. **Members should be involved in making technology decisions that impact the entire House.** Although some Members are informally involved in some institutional technology decisions, the current operating principle for making these decisions is that they should be primarily left to staff. There are few formal processes for involving Members in House technology planning, either to provide direction regarding priorities or to review and approve strategies. While it is true that Members do not come to Congress to manage or plan technology and that the most precious resource in Congress is a Member's time, efforts to change or improve how the House operates, as an institution, are likely to fail without approval or authority from Members.

The Tradeoffs

This vision is strongly linked with those for the Legislative Process and Member Office Operations. To achieve them all, the House will likely need to move from the current decentralized technology adoption and decision-making model to a more centralized or coordinated model. Working to achieve the visions will lay the groundwork for a process that will result in technology that is better targeted to the needs of Members and staff and more cost-effective to the institution. Developing such a process will also enable the House to be more proactive in its selection and implementation of technology. Rather than crises driving institutional technology decisions, the House will establish processes and authority to enable it to strategically adopt and use technology to respond to evolving forces on the House, as well as to avert, mitigate, or more quickly respond to crises.

Additionally, involving Members in technology decisions would increase the effectiveness of those decisions, since they would have the input and authority of Members behind them. Many

of the visions outlined in this document will face cultural and organizational resistance which can only be overcome through the visible support of Members.

However, the House will face significant challenges to achieving this vision. Increasing the coordination or centralization of technology adoption and decision-making will reduce the flexibility and independence that House offices currently exercise. The benefits of relinquishing this flexibility and independence will need to be clearly articulated to overcome the resistance the House will face.

Another challenge will be to engage Members and senior staff at key points in the decision-making process. Many already feel overwhelmed by their current workloads, which makes it difficult to involve them in institutional planning processes and decision-making. Additionally, most do not believe they have the technical knowledge or skills to effectively participate in technology decisions. As a result, the process would need to convey the critical importance of Member and senior staff involvement, respect their time, and enable them to make good decisions without significant technical knowledge.

Officer and Senior Staff Discussion

The officers and senior staff recognized that there could be significant benefits to providing more centralized technology services and better coordination among the institutional support organizations, but there were concerns about how this would be accomplished. Member office Chiefs of Staff and committee Staff Directors expressed significant concern about the potential for systems and services to deteriorate or fail to meet their needs. While they recognized the benefit of saving money by centralizing some services, they stressed that they would need to be assured that the services would meet their needs for them to agree to move to a more centralized environment. They cited examples of how past attempts to provide more centralized services had failed to provide the promised value. They felt it would be extremely important for senior staff to be able to have regular input if the House were to move to a more centralized technology model. They also indicated that they would like some flexibility to develop or acquire technology to support capabilities not provided by the House.

The officers and officials generally agreed that the House would benefit greatly from centralizing many services, but they were also concerned about how this would be attained. Much of the discussion centered on how centralized services would be planned, coordinated and provided. The officers and officials felt that, ideally, the process would be Member-driven and endorsed, but doubted whether this was feasible, due to Members' already heavy workloads and the officers' perceptions of a general lack of interest among Members in being involved in technology decisions. Instead, they believed that a process for planning and coordinating decisions would need to be conducted at the officer and senior staff level and recommendations would then be taken to Members for feedback and approval. The officers also felt strongly that planning and coordinating major technology decisions would require that overarching institutional goals and priorities be identified through some process, probably at the Member or leadership level. They felt that without such goals and priorities it would be difficult to provide centralized technology services.

The leadership staff directors also saw the benefit to centralizing many services, but expressed concerns about how the coordination and planning of these services might be conducted. They expressed the need to know more about how this planning and coordination might take place and what areas it would cover before they could fully endorse it.

Member Discussion

The Members felt that the discussions about technology that were being conducted in these roundtable discussions were extremely important to the future of the institution, and they viewed their input as critical to the process. They indicated that Members must have the best possible access to information that would enable them do their jobs as effectively as possible. The Members involved in the project said they were willing to participate in technology decision-making, especially as it relates to broader issues facing the House. They agreed that technology will play a significant role in the future of the House and that it would need to be managed carefully to protect the core processes and values of democracy and the legislative process. To do this requires the House to look ahead and plan technology carefully so it strengthens, rather than weakens, the institution.

Member Activities

Background

Most technological efforts in the House are geared toward enabling staff to support Members, rather than toward providing Members, themselves, with technological capabilities. Notable exceptions include the House pager system and the BlackBerry system. However, there are potential opportunities for the House to focus efforts on technological projects targeted specifically to Members. Technology can, for example, help facilitate the work of Members when they are out of their offices or traveling in their districts.

The Vision

- 1. Members should have greater access to House information and to their staffs when they are out of their offices.** Whether they are in Washington or in their districts, Members seldom stay in one place for very long, but their work is dependent on timely, reliable access to information and communications. However, few of the House systems and information resources are currently developed with Member access and mobility specifically in mind.
- 2. The House, as an institution, should provide technology to facilitate greater communications between Members and their staff, their colleagues, and their constituents.** Most of the technologies available to facilitate real time communication and collaboration – such as video teleconferencing; online meeting, presentation, and collaboration tools; and even audio conference calls – are more expensive and require greater technical expertise than individual offices can manage. As a result, there are few offices taking advantage of business tools that other knowledge organizations commonly use.

The Tradeoffs

The major benefits of working toward this vision of Member mobility, access, and communication would be to increase the ability of Members to do their jobs effectively. Attaining this vision would provide Members with access to the latest information from their staffs and from the House, as well as the capability to use this information more effectively. It would also allow Members greater freedom and independence to conduct their legislative and representative activities remotely, as necessary. For example, Members could more easily and more productively meet and interact with their staffs while they are traveling. Members could conduct task force, caucus, party, or committee business with one another without all of them being in the same place at the same time. Members could also more regularly interact with constituents while they are in Washington.

The challenges that would arise with attaining this vision are that Members and staff already feel inundated with information, so capabilities that would lead to more information without better tools to process and use the information would likely meet resistance or fail. Members and staff already have cell phones, laptop computers, and BlackBerry devices, and they are seeing their workdays extend farther and farther into their personal lives. Providing more ways to access and exchange information could increase the amount and speed of this information overload, making Members and staff less effective rather than more effective. For this reason, such capabilities would need to provide *better*, rather than simply *more*, information access and communications capabilities.

Members and staff also strongly feel that face to face interaction among Members is absolutely critical to the deliberative and legislative processes. They are resistant to technologies that would erode or negate this interaction. There are already concerns about the effect that technology is having on the deliberative process and the impact that introducing more technology to enable Members to be more independent may have. They are reluctant to consider anything that might further reduce the amount of time Members spend interacting with one another in person, and therefore, might undermine the deliberative process. As a result, any capabilities the House provides would need to offer ways to strengthen and enhance these interactions that are at the core of deliberation.

Officer and Senior Staff Discussion

The issue of technologies to facilitate Member activities was not specifically raised with the officers and the senior staff because this topic was best addressed by Members, themselves. However, during discussion of the other business functions, they did raise some relevant points. The officers and senior staff recognized the need for Members to have high quality communications and information sharing with their staff, especially while they are in their districts or traveling for official business. They also indicated that Members must have access to the best possible information to enable them to do their jobs effectively, and that technology offers innumerable opportunities to provide better information. However, they also noted that providing the high-quality information and access necessary to support Members everywhere they might travel would require significant planning, support, and cost.

Member Discussion

The Members strongly supported the concept of providing them with the highest quality and most reliable access to information and communications possible. They felt that, to do their jobs effectively, they need the best and most timely information possible to enable them to make the best decisions possible. Currently, they felt that they had adequate communications access, but could use better information resources. They indicated that this was especially true on the House floor and in committees, where they feel they would benefit from better and more timely access to information on which they must base their decisions.

Party Organization

Background

Currently, the party organizations – the Speaker, Majority and Minority Leaders, Majority and Minority Whips, Republican Conference, and Democratic Caucus – identify and develop the systems and capabilities they need to support their operations. For the most part, the technological efforts of the party organizations are not coordinated with or supported by the institution, nor are the party leaders involved in determining the strategic direction of technology adoption in the House, as a whole. Each leader devotes the resources they deem necessary to perform their duties and accomplish their goals. Often, however, leaders spend resources and develop systems that are replaced by their successors, which results in unreliable tools for Members and staff and high costs to the institution over the long term as a result of investing in sophisticated systems that will be used only during the tenure of a specific leader.

The Vision

- 1. Leadership should have a role in working with the House to determine the direction of technology adoption in the House, as an institution.** There are currently no formal processes for leadership or Members to be involved in determining the strategic direction of technology adoption in the House. This often results in conflicts and tension between the needs and objectives leadership offices have for technology to support their goals and the technological capabilities and support the House provides.

The Tradeoffs

Better coordination between the party organizations and the House would result in House-provided systems and services targeted to meet the needs and support the goals of the leadership. It could also result in more reliable, consistent, and cost-effective technological systems to support the party organizations.

However, changes in the relationship between the House and leadership offices and in the services the House provides to leadership offices would potentially be difficult to bring about and would probably require the active support of the leaders, themselves. Additionally, getting

leadership engaged in strategic technology decisions may require establishing official processes and policies for doing so. Strategic technology decisions ideally support institutional strategic decisions, which the House currently has no process for identifying.

Officer and Senior Staff Discussion

The officers and senior staff in Member offices and committees viewed it as necessary for leadership to be engaged, at some level, in establishing institutional goals and providing strategic direction to institutional efforts to implement technology. They did not feel that leadership offices should necessarily be involved in the minutiae and management of these decisions, but that direction or authority should come from leadership.

The leadership staff, on the other hand, were unsure of the role their offices would have in making technology decisions for the House. They acknowledged that, as the political leaders of the House, they have significant authority over House operations, but they did not view their responsibilities as hands-on. They delegate authority for House operations to officers and committees, rather than being directly involved.

Member Discussion

Due to lack of time, the vision for technology to support the party organizations was not resolved with Members. This will require further discussion with Members before plans can be made.